

THE CRIME OF MISS MERRIVALE

BY ADELE MARIE SHAW

WITH A DRAWING BY MARTIN JUSTICE

I'M not one of those women who want to fumble every baby they see. I never in my life stopped to coo over some mama's cherub swaddled in pinky perambulator-quilts, and I wasn't thinking of babies on the day when I fell into crime for the sake of one.

I was entirely occupied with myself. I'm a mousy kind of person to look at—too quiet, and too small, and too peacefully dressed. After Esther's death I had grown mousier and quieter than ever; but on this day I didn't feel quiet or timid or any of the things that people believed me to be. I was fresh from the exhilaration of doing something daring. I had resigned my position!

It was a teaching position that I had resigned, and it was my dishonest principal to whom I owed my daring. He had ordered me to sign a report promoting a girl whose work was worth exactly nothing, and I had refused, and resigned in the same breath. If I hadn't been all alone in the world, with no one dependent on me, I couldn't have afforded the defiance.

When I left the school-building after writing my resignation, I was so absorbed that I took the Broadway car. If I had gone up-town by the Elevated, my usual route—but there is no use in thinking of that.

Broadway was gay with shoppers, and the florists' windows were enough to make one forget there had ever been a schoolroom. I began to plan what I would do with the next morning. A free morning in the middle of the week!

I had no interest to spare for the people about me, and I was annoyed that I could not keep my eyes from the baby across the aisle. I noticed her first because she was so beautiful, and then

because I had never seen a child look so frightened. She was dressed in good taste, and her brown baby coat matched the lights in her bronzy curls. I thought she might be two or three years old. Her face was thinner than it should have been, and her gray-blue eyes looked larger than was natural. She had one of those baby faces meant to be full of laughter and bouncing happiness. That was one reason why she was such a pathetic mite—the happiness wasn't there.

She held her tiny body as rigid as possible, and kept glancing in a terrified way at the woman who had her in charge. The woman was a big, handsome creature, with perhaps a trifle too much style in her get-up; but everything she wore was as harmonious as it was expensive, and there was something imposing about her splendid body. A fine, large woman always fills me with admiration, and often with envy.

I didn't envy this woman, though, for I didn't like her face. I felt my exhilaration oozing out every time I looked at her. I tried not to see her, but wherever she was you had to see her.

The child had been planted on the seat in such a way that she kept tipping about and slipping, and whenever she lost her balance the woman yanked her back in a fashion that made my blood boil. Finally the child began to cry softly, the tears dripping on her cheeks, though she made no sound. The woman's face flushed a dark, ugly color, and I saw her deliberately lean down and pinch that little creature's wrist. It was as devilish a nip as you could imagine. I can see that baby's face and the fascinated terror of it now when I dream bad dreams. Her eyes had a really dreadful expression for a child. What mother, I wondered,

could have trusted her child to such a fiend?

Suddenly the car lurched, and the baby fell to the floor. She bumped her head dreadfully. I sprang forward to help pick her up, but the woman's glance froze my interference, and I saw her again meet thumb and forefinger in the child's flesh as she put her back upon the seat. There was none of the cross guardian slapping a child one minute and hugging her the next about it. It was sheer ugliness.

That was a horrid ride. All the way up-town the woman bullied and tortured the little creature; and yet what roused one most wasn't anything she *did*. It was, even in her anger, the death-cold indifference with which she treated the forlorn little thing.

Apparently, nothing that she did attracted attention, except from those close at hand. I think no one but myself saw the pinching. The little girl cried out only once, and that was at the very end.

The handsome woman sat next the door, the child beside her, and beyond the child another woman, who held in her lap a little boy. The other woman must have noticed something, for her face looked indignant. The little boy held up his brown bear for the baby to see. She turned toward it with a look of pitiful longing; then she was snatched up and set over next the door.

The other woman put her arm about the little boy, and never glanced again at the baby girl. But I did. I couldn't help it, and my heart was sore in my body. She sat there, wedged against the wall, her tiny feet straight out before her, her face set in an unchildlike struggle; she was trying not to be discovered crying.

It was so unnatural that it was awful. She was too little for it; the tears overflowed again, and she caught her breath in a sob. I suppose my look helped to anger the woman, for the dark color came with a rush under her smooth skin, and she bent down and whispered something I didn't hear. It was then that the child cried out—sharply, as an animal will when it is caught in a door and mangled.

"Please don't, mama! Don't — me!"

I lost a word; but I knew then, as well

as I did afterward, what that dreadful little shriek meant.

The very beasts of the field would have been moved to interfere, but what could I do? The word "mama" showed me that interference would be difficult. And almost immediately the woman rose and got off the car. The smile and tone with which she thanked the conductor as he handed down the little girl made me sick. She could be gracious, and she was a good actress.

I followed them, for I was near my own corner. The mother wrenched the child along without looking down at her. I kept close to them, my heart pounding away under my cloth jacket, and everything in the world forgotten but the misery of what I had seen.

All at once, at the end of the first block, the baby pulled away from the woman's grasp and plunged ahead in a desperate little run.

"Unka Steve!" she called.

I saw a tall young man seize her and hurry across the side street just beyond. Somehow I got to him. The woman was kept back by a van. I am so small that I can slip through where other people have to wait.

"Don't let her have it! She's cruel to it!" I shouted at the man.

I must have been a little beside myself, as we all are when we see cruelty that we can't prevent. The young man had signaled a cab, but the stupid driver had gone off without seeing the signal or hearing the young man's whistle.

He looked down at me without any amazement.

"What can I do?" he said. "I'm only a friend of Jim's. The court gave her to Netta. I'd run off with her in a minute if I could."

He said this so fast that if my every faculty had not been set on hearing I might not have caught it in the midst of the hubbub that had arisen. People were gathering in a thick crowd. It was their determined effort to find out what was going on that had kept back the mother.

"What is it? Lady fainted?" some one asked.

"My baby! That man has kidnaped my baby!" shrieked the woman, and the mob turned its head toward the voice.

"Give her to me—come to the Venetia, around the corner—Miss Merrivale," I cried; and before the child had been fairly seen in the young man's arms, she was in mine and I had disappeared.

II

It is easy to push out of a crowd on the side away from the excitement. Everybody was looking for a *small* baby in a man's arms, for the woman was still crying out, "He has kidnaped my baby!" I dared not make too great haste, and I even lingered a moment on the outskirts of the throng, as if curious, before I got away.

There are two entrances to the building on that corner, and I went in by the one on the avenue and out by the one on the side street. This one was almost opposite the Venetia. The crowd was now blocking traffic in all directions, and its bulk, I then believed, hid me from the woman. A policeman passed me, hurrying toward the jam of people. I turned into the alley at the side of the Venetia, and went up in the service elevator.

"Did the cleaning woman come to do my rooms to-day?" I asked Mike, the janitor's assistant.

He knew me well—I had got him his position—and he made some joking allusion to the baby, intended as a compliment to me. I told him that I was "taking care of her for a sick mother," and was "going to take her to her aunt." I had never, that I remember, told a lie in my life before.

I was thankful when I was in my own sunny apartment at the top of the house, with the door locked and that trembling bundle still grasped in my aching arms. For a long time I was too busy to be scared. I was determined to stop that trembling, and I lighted the gas-log to make the place warmer, heated some milk in the chafing-dish, and found some cookies in the kitchen. I carried the little thing wherever I went, and she kinked one arm tightly about my neck. Pringle, the kitten, followed us, purring like a mill-race.

While the little girl ate, and Pringle alternately lapped warm milk and stood on two legs to have her ears rubbed, I was so hot with indignation at the shocking neglect the child's coat had covered

that I was hardly scared at all. And her bruised, uncared-for body hadn't suffered half as much as her frightened little soul. Do the best I could, I could not make her smile. She clung to me between mouthfuls, begging, "Papa! Papa!"

"We'll go find papa," I told her over and over again.

When she had eaten, I stripped off her shoes and stockings and held her tiny feet to the gas-log blaze. Terror had made her cold; she needed warmth. Then, for the first time, the stiff little body relaxed and she sank back into my arms. Pringle, jealous, leaped into my lap and crowded down beside her; and when both were asleep, I began to be scared. I suppose there never was a worse scared woman!

The baby shivered and jerked in sudden terror in her dreams, and Pringle woke and gave a sleepy lick to the little hands I warmed against my cheeks. Every sound came to my ears like doom. I did not dare to go out as usual for my dinner, and I did not dare to stay where I was. I ought, it seemed to me, to have fled at once and carried the baby with me. The man had not come or sent a message. Had they arrested him?

I did not once wonder whether or not I had done right to believe in him. I knew I had. I could feel his eyes searching mine, and hear his voice demanding, "What shall I do?"

When it grew dark, I deposited Pringle on a cushion and undressed the baby without waking her. Her curls shone with a glint of the bronzy lights that had first caught my eye, and they fell against the peach-bloom of Esther's prettiest dressing-sack in a soft tangle that I longed to comb out and smooth across my fingers. As I tucked her into the pillows on my couch, and drew a blanket over her, she stirred without opening her eyes; and then she smiled—the first hint of brightness on her wee face.

"Papa make nes' for Marzhie," she said, and sighed a long, heart-breaking sigh of comfort.

She thought she was back with "papa" somewhere; and, law or no law, it was "papa" who ought to have her. I had stolen a baby, and I was glad I had. That was all there was about it!



THE LITTLE MAN JUMPED FOR THE INCLINE, BUT STEPHEN OLIVER WAS BEFORE HIM

But at half past seven, when the bell rang, all my bones melted with fear. I held to the table where I stood, and looked around at my books and Esther's ferns in a frenzy of cowardice. If only Esther were there to tell me what to do!

Somehow, at last, I got to the door and opened it. Esther and I had lived alone. We couldn't afford a maid. I have been told, since, that when I finally stood on the threshold, looking inquiringly at the figure on its farther side, I was as cool and smiling as the most innocent of the law-abiding. I didn't feel it.

The figure that I confronted was a tall workman in overalls.

"Sorry to be so late, Miss Merrivale," he said. "The boss sent me round. He said the trunk had got to be mended to-day." He made this announcement in a rough-and-ready way, loud enough for any employee of the Venetia to have his curiosity satisfied. I had known him instantly, even before he pulled off his soft hat. You can't easily disguise a face from me. It was the tall young man.

"I'd given you up." This I said before the door closed; then, safely on my own side, I went on: "You'd better get a trunk out of the storeroom and do a little hammering."

"I had to come in these clothes, because I am watched," he explained. "The chances are that I have been shadowed even here. The man who was tinkering about my rooms lent me these togs. He's holding the fort there till I get back. You're a brave girl. I hope you haven't been—worried."

He picked up the steamer-trunk I pointed out and carried it into the living-room, giving me, as he stood up, another of those close, searching glances that had filled me with such confidence in the afternoon. More than ever, I liked his eyes and his voice.

"Worried! There never was such a coward as I am since the beginning of the world!" I groaned; but I smiled, and he didn't believe me.

"This hinge needs fixing," he said, and fell to work with a screw-driver, giving a few needless blows with a hammer for the behoof of any listener in the corridor outside.

The electric light shone squarely on his face as he looked up. It was a man's

face; it had decision and repression without hardness, and a glow of that humor which is the final mark of civilization. I entirely forgot that, in other clothes, his presence would have been an indiscretion. I began to think more clearly. His coming had removed the paralysis of fear.

"We've got to talk fast and think fast," he said. "I suppose Netta has prejudiced you against Jim."

"I never saw any of them till to-day—in the car. I don't know who the baby is."

He stared at me, his eyes filled with a light that made me feel like a child pleased at unexpected praise.

"The baby," he said, his eyes still on mine, "is Marjorie Harding. Her father is James Harding. You'll have to take my word for it that Jim is the right man to have her. I've known him for years, and I'd trust my own daughter to him. Not that I have a daughter, but I know Jim."

He pounded vigorously a moment. I watched him. I was ashamed to be glad when he said he hadn't a daughter. What affair of mine was it if he was married and had a family?

"You've seen the mother," he went on, without looking up. "She's a dangerous woman. The papers were full of the thing—her side of it. She played the abused wife so well that every wool-head on the bench was ready to wring Jim's neck for her. And Jim looked dissipated. He was only miserable. He'd stuck it out for five years, to save scandal. No man has a right to leave a child with such a woman. He'd taken care of her—the baby—he and an old nurse-maid. He lived in terror, though. Netta's temper is the kind that murders. But he was foxy. He never petted Marjorie where Netta could see him."

"Why—"

"She'd have found out that she had a new way to hurt him. For a long time she ignored the child; then, of course, something brought it home to her—how Jim cared."

"But why did she want to keep her?"

"To torture Jim." He gave a fierce turn to the screw he had put in the place of the weak one. "Do sit down," he said. "You've no idea how plausible

that woman can make herself. When Jim married her, she was still human, or seemed so; but they lost their money, and—I tell you, Miss Merrivale, I do not believe that, for cold, brutal selfishness, there is her match on God's earth to-day!"

"Where is Jim—Mr. Harding?"

"California. Will you help me get Marjorie to him?"

He had risen. From his height, he was looking straight down at me. I met the look.

"Yes, I will," I said. "See here." I turned toward the couch, where the child still slept, and drew down the striped blanket. "Look," I repeated, and pushed up the wide sleeve of the dressing-jacket. "And that is not the worst."

I choked over the last words, though I was ready for action, not crying.

"No, that is not the worst," he echoed.

The sound of the words had in it what I felt but couldn't say. It was not impotent rage, either. There is a heaven-born fury that can see to strike.

"I'd better start to-night," I went on.

"Good for you!" he cried, and grasped my hands in both of his, with a grip that hurt the flesh and healed the spirit. "I've brought time-tables, money, and a code by which we can telegraph each other. My name is Oliver—Stephen Oliver; the address is on the paper with the code."

While we finished our plans, Pringle, who had waked to sniff at the trunk, leaped to his shoulder and settled with a loud and steady purring against his cheek. He lifted her to his knee and thumped and rumbled her gently as we talked, and the volume of her purr grew and grew till it sounded like the bubbling of a million pots. It was a pleasantly quieting sound in the midst of the tension. I had already settled on what I would say to Mrs. Wilson in the next apartment; she would take care of Pringle while I was gone.

Evidently the police were not watching me—had not heard of me. I got away safely on the half past nine train. There would be no stop till we reached Poughkeepsie. I settled in my section with a sense of blessed relief, and asked the porter to have the lower berth made up immediately.

While I waited for him, I leaned back against the cushions, feeling less alone than I had at any time since Esther's death. Marjorie's eyes were shut, but the transparent look of her face, and the bluish shadows where the long lashes rested, went to my heart in a pang that tightened my arms on her. I slipped off her wide, floppy-rimmed hat, to let her head rest more comfortably against my shoulder, and smoothed back the curls that tumbled over her eyes.

"Thank God," I thought, "she is safe now!"

Then I looked up. In the section ahead, facing me, a cruel gloating in her half-closed eyes and on her smiling lips, sat Marjorie's mother.

III

For the next half hour, with Marjorie trembling in my clasp, I fought off the woman's claim. The passion of protection with which I clutched the child choked me when I should have been most clear. I failed.

The conductor, scandalized, found the scene prolonged beyond his patience. At last some one—I think it was a brakeman—gripped my elbows from behind. The woman seized Marjorie. Till now the little thing had been too frightened to speak. At her mother's touch, she bore her testimony. As her arms were dragged from my neck, she threw her whole writhing little body toward me.

"Don't let her—take me!" she screamed.

Mrs. Harding smothered the words in her shoulder. The hostility of the looks fastened on me by my fellow passengers did not change. The presence of listeners, my suffering, Marjorie's terror, had transformed the stolid beauty of this abnormal being; she glowed with the lust of triumph. Her wonderfully melting voice, her swimming eyes, her beautiful hand pressed to a passionately agitated bosom, had told more powerfully in her favor than the proofs she showed, and they would have been enough. To those onlookers who did not hold me a vicious criminal, I was a madwoman.

"Crazy, and over children," I heard one dowager mutter. "There are old maids like that—but so young a woman—terrible!"

I looked from one to another of the faces turned toward me. Not one encouraged a plea for aid. And who could blame them?

I followed Mrs. Harding. With Marjorie's frightened face still clamped against her shoulder, where no one could see its terror, she was moving toward the dressing-room.

"You'd better go back," said the conductor, and touched my arm.

"Am I under arrest?"

As I turned on him, and gazed straight up into his eyes, I thought he must see that I was a woman to be believed; but the aversion with which he blocked my way was not modified.

"Mrs. Harding does not want you held for arrest," he answered coldly.

"She does not dare to have me arrested! She doesn't dare to face the law, with her child's body black and blue and swollen where she has pinched and beaten it!"

My voice I held quiet, but my face must have looked desperate. He glanced over and through and around me as if I had not spoken, and passed on.

I stationed myself at the door of the dressing-room. Mrs. Harding had locked herself in with Marjorie. No sound came to me from the other side of the door. The long train pounding on beneath me said: "*Failed—you have failed—you have failed,*" till I could have sworn it had a human voice. My thoughts seemed all spilled in a useless agony.

What was she doing to Marjorie? What could I say to Stephen Oliver? Then, from the sick depths of my defeat something rose up in me, and the wheels pounded out: "*Back—get her back—get her back!*" Of course I would get her back! I could no more live with that child in Netta Harding's power than I could live with my head under water. But how, *how* to do it?

When Mrs. Harding opened the door and came out, I was Elizabeth Merrivale again, not a cowering thing crushed by the first failure. Marjorie lay limp in the woman's arms. I saw that she was drugged; she could no longer show terror of her own mother. The door had been shut a long time, but I feared it must have been a heavy dose that could

send a three-year-old child into complete drowsiness so soon. Whatever plan I made would be all the easier to execute with no danger of an outcry from Marjorie; and while I planned, she was not suffering. I crept into my berth and sat canvassing the poor possibilities.

In the next section there was no motion. Mrs. Harding was not undressing. At a quarter past eleven we should be at Poughkeepsie. There she would undoubtedly leave the train.

I felt sure she must have seen me carrying Marjorie across the street to the Venetia. While the detectives watched Stephen Oliver, she had managed her own inquiries. She would be afraid of publicity.

The best plan I could conceive was poor enough, but some plan must be tried within an hour. I worked open the double windows at the head of my berth, and peered out. The night was dark and the wind cold. I could just make out the ground beside the track. I laid my long veil on the pillows, felt to see that the code and the money were pinned inside my clothes, took a challis dressing-jacket from my bag, and set the bag and my hat near the window. Then I put on the challis sack, covering my shirt-waist, so that I looked as if I were preparing for the night.

The first time the porter passed my section, to answer a call farther up the car, I slipped out between the curtains. Every one was in bed. I went quickly down to the dressing-room, but not into it. As I passed the corner beyond the berths, I thrust into the metal cuspidor a bundle that I had arranged, and lighted it. I always carry vestas when I travel.

I could see through the empty vestibule, where the platforms swung curve on curve as the train rushed on through the dark; no one was in sight. The folded step-ladder leaned against the wall, as the porter had left it. I mounted it, and jerked the signal-cord, dropping almost to my full weight before I let go.

The paper I had crushed into the cuspidor was burning well; smoke was beginning to rise from the bits of blanket tucked inside. I was back at my berth before the porter had finished arranging the windows for the old gentleman beyond. I had not been away a minute.

I heard a voice fretting about a draft. Very likely the breeze from my wide-open window was stealing out under my curtains. I was thankful that I had been able to secure a whole section. I dared not peep into the curtain-walled aisle.

An exclamation — from the porter, I suppose—with a swirl of smoke sucking in at my feet, came close on the shock of the brakes grinding the train to a standstill. Cries broke out instantly. People in all manner of attire leaped from their berths. Mrs. Harding was out of hers, fully dressed, bag in hand, before the porter could get past her to investigate.

"What is it?" "Open the doors!" "Accident!" "Fire! We're on fire!" And then, from some hysterical woman: "My God, we're going into the river!"

Mrs. Harding had forgotten Marjorie. She led the rush for the door. I slid under the curtains to the deserted berth, seized Marjorie, and was back, wholly unnoticed. With my veil I tied her upon the pillows. My arms nearly failed me as I pushed her through the window and tried to sway the dead-weight of the bundle to one side before I let her drop. It seemed forever before I could get myself through after her, small as I am; and I had an instant's agony as I let myself go, lest I should fall on her.

I found her safe. I had thrown out hat and bag, but the bag must have rolled. Groping, I gathered hat and pillows into my arms, with the unconscious baby, and clambered away from the track. I ran as fast as I could for the weight I carried and the roughness of the rocks, making for the black shadows of the trees above — and came straight up against a barbed-wire fence. I tore myself, clothes and hands, but I rolled Marjorie under and crawled after. For a minute I was too breathless to lift her, so I dragged her up a little precipice on the pillows, and peeled them away from her as I gathered her up again.

Then the first light shone out on my side of the car. It sent me stumbling forward in worse haste. The light multiplied itself. Lanterns flashed along the whole length of the train. Marjorie grew heavier every second. I wondered if she were dying—drugged to death. To be found with a kidnaped child dead in

my arms! My position appeared to me plainly for the first time.

Shouts came up from below as the searchers pounced on the bag and the abandoned pillows. Passengers had joined the train-crew. One fat man was puffing with extraordinary speed directly after me, flashing his electric-lamp ahead. Once it showed me the way. My breath was coming in useless gasps. They were getting nearer.

I had to free my right hand to cling to the trees. The rocks grew steeper, tangled with vines. I caught my foot and rolled. The crackling of bushes came from all around me. The boulder that stopped my fall was covered with the vines. Grasping them to save myself, I plunged my hand into nothingness, yet I could see the rock towering over me. It was either two rocks leaning together, or it held a little cave. I broke through the twisted stems and crouched inside, over Marjorie, dragging broken trailers before the black heap I made.

The fat man, puffing dreadfully, wasn't ten yards away. He sent the beam from his electric-lamp to the very spot, but his eyes couldn't have followed it. After long eternities there was a whistle of recall. With snorts and puffs and a heavy roar, the train was gone. The slamming down of platforms sounded like oaths as it pulled away. I was alone in the dark.

I have always been afraid of the dark. The darkness of the country is awful. Crouched in that hole in the rocks, with the cold wind searching my bones, I was aghast at what I had done. I had heard that kidnaping meant twenty years in the State prison. And stopping an express-train—that, too, was a crime!

All at once I discovered that Marjorie was awake. The violence of the motion, or the cold, had broken through her drowsiness. I spoke to her quickly and softly, and the way her little arms flung out to hold to me is meat and drink to me still. The terror eased. I should not have to say to Stephen Oliver:

"I have lost Marjorie!"

Staggering, I climbed to my feet, her arms still about my neck. No one sprang from the shadows to intercept me. No one had been left behind to watch, but searchers would be sent—from the next station. I had heard them say so. I

would get as far from the railroad as I could.

I have never been able to tell any one about that night. Perhaps, if I had had any dinner, or if the wind had been less sharp, or if I had not stumbled into a ditch and made my skirts heavy with water—but even then it would have been no less full of alarms. I could see Nettie Harding's malicious eyes in every gleam across the path. It seemed years that I strained on and on under Marjorie's weight, always with awful shapes pursuing. Often I sat down, but the shapes, like men creeping upon me, drove me to my feet. Sometimes, on the highway, Marjorie walked, my hands under her arms, till her steps failed and her head fell against my knees.

It was well on between midnight and morning when I saw a light moving queerly in the open, and muffled figures with it. A great door creaked wide, and I was looking into a barn. A steam came from it into the nipping air, and the smell of animals close-housed, with the fragrance of hay and a waft of kerosene from the lantern.

Life came stinging to my numb body. I traveled faster and faster toward the light and the muffled figures, folding Marjorie tighter as I got nearer.

"Please," I began, and then the lantern wavered.

Strong arms took us both as into a tower of refuge.

IV

"It's a blessin' we were up with the sick bossy," said Aunt Reba afterward.

That was all the complaint she and Uncle Enos ever made over the trouble they had thrust upon them for the next two weeks. It was they who outwitted the persistence of country gossips, they who did the talking with the inquiring constable sent scouting by telegrams along the line, they who got my messages to Stephen Oliver and his to me, they who set us again on our way.

Aunt Reba's circumstantial account of the orphaned life of her Cousin Ellen's daughter—that was myself—and of the young woman's devotion to an equally orphaned child left to her care—that was Marjorie—had made it easy for me to be, and to keep on being, Ellen Bristol.

I had changed my black dress for dark blue, and with her curls shorn to close ringlets, her clothing new, the color beginning to warm her cheeks where the purple shadows lay more lightly, Marjorie was half disguised.

Before we reached San Francisco, Stephen Oliver had been there a week. James Harding had vanished. His last letter had been from Los Angeles, a month before. Marjorie and I settled down to wait in a boarding-house. Advertisement, search—everything failed. Then, on a day when the sky was blazing with promise, so gay that my hope went like a ball of lead down and out of sight just because the blue seemed so heartless, a distracted motor-cab came hurtling up the street, and jerked to a stop under our windows. Stephen Oliver bolted from it through the door, which happened to be standing open while the maid scrubbed the threshold.

I saw him, and knew something must be wrong. It was not his way to bolt. I was at the head of the stairs by the time he was on the wet sill.

"What is it?" I called.

"Jim! Sails in ten minutes for Japan! Don't stop for your hat!" he answered.

I had my hat on. Marjorie and I had just come in from walking up and down the block. Marjorie, hatless and coatless, as I had that instant stripped her, was in my arms, and we were all three in the cab, before the astonished maid had had time to close her mouth.

I wrapped my coat about Marjorie and listened. The air swirled past us so we seemed to be blowing into space, but I made out:

"Position—business house in Tokyo—Holliday thinks—gone already if she sailed on time—uh!"

We had collided with a dray. We lost a minute getting away. Then again we were flying.

"Catch—papa!" shouted Marjorie between gasps.

But should we catch him? Policemen pursued us, vainly waving commands; people abroad upon the streets looked at us with curiosity or rage as we leaped past.

"She's there!"

Stephen Oliver, with Marjorie held high, was out of the cab and half-way

up the dock, I swift beside them, plunging through the crowd to the very edge of the water where the gangway should have been. It was gone! Sailors were replacing the section of the ship's rail.

Marjorie's head was tipped back. Her eyes danced from face to face of the throng leaning from the deck above us.

"My papa! My papa!" She had seen "Jim." If Stephen Oliver's grip had been less sure, she would have been in the water.

"Hit!" he yelled to the sailors. "Wait there—get this child to her father!"

The sailors grinned. The mob jeered, then grew interested.

"What is it?" asked the woman beside me. "Lost child?"

The word went like flame across the packed mass of human beings.

"Jim! Jim Harding!"

Stephen's voice carried above the confusion. Every face turned to us—even a listless one straight over the spot where I stood. The listless face lifted slowly, then bent downward; its look, frowning, traveled along the crowd on the pier. The look came to Marjorie. The listless face changed, charged with a thousand volts of joy. The mob caught the look. With a frantic gesture at Stephen, Harding sprang for an officer. We saw him arguing violently. The officer shook his head. They were casting off the cables.

A commotion behind us pushed us aside. A shabby cab had rolled up the wharf, a shabby horse stood panting within arm's length, a quiet little man had tripped from the cab and was waving a shabby bag at the officer. The officer saw.

"Just a minute, Mr. Wilts!" he howled.

"One of the owners of the line," explained the woman still beside me.

"Steve—ready!" yelled Harding.

White with excitement, he stood at the head of the gangway. Those on deck had made way for him. Above and below, everybody was watching. The planks heaved into place. The little man jumped for the incline, but Stephen Oliver was before him. The officer fumed in his way, the little man fumed behind, but over the shoulder of one, with the other

dancing with rage at his heels, Stephen passed Marjorie to her father.

"By, kiddie!" said Stephen.

Then he was back on the pier. The little man was aboard, the gangway had slid to its resting-place, and the crowd went mad yelling its head off—a perfect roar of joy. The woman beside me cried and laughed and cried again.

"Goo'-by, 'Isbeth. By, Unka Steve!" shrilled Marjorie in a pause, and the yelling began again.

All at once I realized that she was gone. She had her arms tight about her father's neck. My arms were empty. I lost her face for tears, though I waved till it was out of sight.

I was alone; the old desolation had taken me back to itself.

"The cab is just on the other side of those bales."

I looked up into Stephen's eyes waiting for mine. Always, since then, the sight of the cargoes that go down to the sea in ships, the dusty, horsey, salty smell of wharves, the breeze from the ocean, or the sound of cheering, sets my heart beating out again the blessedness of that hour.

V

THE railroad never hunted up the Elizabeth Merrivale who stopped the express. Nerta Harding went to South America. Jim came home.

Once, in the early fall, when Stephen and I took Marjorie, with our own little Esther, to riot over the heads of Aunt Reba and Uncle Enos, I was brought face to face again with the terrors of that night on the train. I was alone with the children, while Stephen, carried off to a private car, talked business with a director of the road. The conductor came for the tickets, and when I said, "My husband has them," he looked at me and I at him. It was the man who had told me I ought to be behind bars.

I think I grew pale with the remembrance; but just then, as it often happens in day-dreams, but seldom in a contrary world, Stephen came back, and with him his friend.

"Come into my car, Mrs. Oliver. I'm lonely," said the director of the road. "Well, well, Marjorie Harding, if you don't grow like a weed!"